

THE BAPTIST Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION

DEC 19 2007

SINCE 1877

DECEMBER 13, 2007

VOL. 131

NO. 49


**MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS**

HURRICANE DAMAGED — Bill Hurt Jr. (right), pastor of First Church, Decatur, Al., and former pastor of First Church Natchez, and Lloyd Sweatt, pastor of Meadowood Church, Amory, survey a room at Gulfshore Assembly near Pass Christian after Hurricane Katrina destroyed the facility in August 2005. Hurt and Sweatt were members of a special committee that ultimately recommended the sale of the property. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)



\$18 million offered for Henderson Point

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

The Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) voted unanimously on December 4 to move forward on a developer's \$18 million offer to purchase the Henderson Point property in coastal Harrison County that served as the home of Gulfshore Assembly before being destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

Developer Douglas Johnson of Mandeville, La., submitted a Letter of Intent on behalf of NewTrac East LLC, to purchase the property for a multi-use, multi-million dollar project he plans to name Gulfshore Point.

The offer from Johnson, a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, comes after the MBCB Executive Committee on September 24 rejected all offers made during an open bidding process that brought disappointing results.

Johnson was not one of the bidders during that process. He contacted Convention Board officials several weeks later and inquired about the status of the property.

"We've been reminded again that we are involved with God and not the other way around. The way this offer came about clearly shows the movement of His hand," said Gary Richardson, MBCB president and pastor of North Oxford Church, Oxford.

"Mississippi Baptists are a blessed people, and we can be assured that the Lord has plans that are bigger than ours. I just feel honored to be able to watch this happen and see where He takes us from here," Richardson said.

"We have really enjoyed working with the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board to facilitate the acquisition of the Henderson Point property," Johnson said. "We believe our goals for the property are



KATRINA'S AFTERMATH — Months after Hurricane Katrina destroyed Gulfshore Assembly near Pass Christian in August 2005, the property sits idled and ruined with the Earl Kelly complex reduced to a rusting frame. A Louisiana developer has made an \$18 million offer for the property. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

in line with the values of the convention board for stewardship of the land."

Messengers to the 2006 annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention voted to accept a post-Katrina special committee's recommendation to sell the property, with the stipulation that the new owners would not build a casino or any gambling-related businesses on the property.

Johnson stressed in a meeting with the MBCB Executive Committee prior to the Board's vote that he agreed with the no-gambling stipulation and said he planned to preserve the history of the property in special ways, including construction of a chapel to commemorate its time as Gulfshore Assembly.

"We want to build a wholesome, family-friendly development. We have no intention of building a casino on the property," he said.

"Following the decision of the Convention that we sell the Henderson Point property, it has been a long and tedious process. At times it looked like nothing was happening and all of the time good things were happening from the hand of God," said Jim Futral, MBCB executive director-treasurer.

"The Lord is leading and Mississippi Baptists, the Convention Board, and the Executive Committee have consistently desired to be sensitive to following where He is leading us. The events of the last few weeks are a few more steps in walking with God to accomplish His purposes among us."

"We will continue to seek Him and seek to follow as He guides us," Futral said.

Henderson Point, on the eastern shoreline of the Bay of St. Louis, was settled in the mid-1800s by local attorney John Henderson, who served in both the Mississippi Senate and the U.S. Senate and whose name was eventually attached to the property. By the turn of the 20th century, a resort named The Inn by the Sea had been opened there.

A few years prior to World War II, the federal government purchased the property from the resort owners and built the U.S. Merchant Marine Cadet Basic School. The training facility was closed shortly after World War II ended. Mississippi Baptists purchased the property in 1958 and named it Gulfshore Baptist Assembly.

Mississippi Baptists utilized the Merchant Marine barracks and other buildings for the Assembly until Hurricane Camille wiped it out in 1969. A state-of-the-art facility with hurricane-resistant features was rebuilt on the property, but Hurricane Katrina's massive winds and waves destroyed everything except the main building's superstructure.

At the 2007 annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention in October, then-President Clarence Cooper appointed a special committee to make recommendations on the location of a new conference ministry facility. Lloyd Sweatt, pastor of Meadowood Church, Amory, will serve as chairman of that committee.



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VOLUME 131 • NUMBER 49
(ISSN-0005-5778)

Published weekly except weeks of July 4 and Christmas by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 515 Mississippi Street, Jackson, MS 39201. Subscription \$9.35 per year payable in advance. Economy plans available for cooperating Mississippi churches. Periodicals postage paid at Jackson, MS. Member, Association of State Baptist Papers. Deadlines: New items — one calendar week prior to requested publication date. Advertising — two calendar weeks prior to requested publication date. All submissions are subject to editing.

Stocking stuffers no longer

Early sales reports indicate that pop music CDs are flying off store shelves this holiday gift season. Many of the larger stores in Mississippi that carry CDs have lowered the price in recent weeks to \$9.99 or less for some of the hottest performers in the business. That may not seem like a bargain basement price to us old-timers, but quite a few CDs these days go for anywhere from \$13.99-\$24.99. This year's lower sale prices have turned CDs into perfect stocking stuffers.

It's too bad the industry is just as wicked and perverse as every other form of secular entertainment in this country. Along with movies, television, and radio, the recording industry has for many years been in a race to see just how low they can take humanity. The Coarser the Better, seems to be the slogan adopted by the recording industry.

The worst offenders on today's music scene extol the virtues of raping their mothers, killing policemen, running drugs, shooting disrespectful girlfriends, and engaging in every form of perverse sex known to man. In the past five years, there have been quite a few number one hits that dealt with committing those crimes and many others.

The recording industry has never been a guardian of the country's morality, but the so-called "artists" of the last several years have taken us all to a new low — and society is paying the price.

Rapper Eminem, who has written and performed a number of songs that denigrate African-Americans and suggest killing homosexuals, reached a new low recently when the lyrics for his song, We Are Americans, were found floating around the Internet.

"I'M SIXTY YEARS OLD
AND I DON'T RECOGNIZE
A SINGLE NAME ON THE
MUSIC CHARTS TODAY. THAT
SUITS ME JUST FINE!"



In the song, Eminem raps, "(Expletive deleted) money. I don't rap for dead presidents. I'd rather see the President dead." In the world of rap jargon, "dead presidents" refers to money, since most U.S. currency carries the image of a dead former president.

Are these the kind of songs we want in our children's stockings, hung with care by the fireplace? Do we want our teens repeating such lyrics over and over, until the threshold for such violent acts is reduced to zero in their developing minds? Christian parents should take a hard look (or listen, rather) at pop music.

Too many parents think pop music is harmless, regardless of the subject matter. "When I was growing up," they argue, "everything in pop music glorified drug use, but I didn't turn into a dope head." While that may be true, many

other young people were ruined by the drugs glorified in those songs. Even more to the point, how many songs of any pop music era called upon youths to torture, murder, rape, and destroy anyone who gets in the way of their pleasure? A whole music culture has sprung up around such behavior, and is being supported by unwitting parents and children.

WorldNet Daily columnist Thomas Jipping thinks all of this has a tragic effect.

"The teenage murderer of Officer William Robertson in Milwaukee said he was inspired by lyrics from gangsta rapper Tupac Shakur. The teenage murderer of Texas State Trooper Bill Davidson actually defended himself by arguing that violent gangsta rap motivated him to kill. To murder his father in Los Angeles, Christopher Golly lured him to his bedroom by blasting on his stereo a rock song in which the singer fantasizes about killing his father.

"Mitchell Johnson, who with Andrew Golden killed a teacher and four students and wounded 10 others in Jonesboro, Ark., listened to Tupac Shakur. Kip Kinkel, who murdered his parents in Springfield, Ore., consumed the violent nihilism of shock-rocker Marilyn Manson. So did Andrew Wurst, who killed a teacher at an eighth-grade dance in Edinboro, Pa.; Luke Woodham, who murdered his (mother) and (two) classmates in Pearl, Miss.; and Columbine killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold."

Christian parents should think twice before buying such music, at \$9.99 or any other price. Too much of the sin to which our children are exposed is out of our control, but their CD collection is one thing among many that we parents can control.

For the sake of our children, we'd better find the courage to do that. Holiday gift-giving 2007 is the perfect place to start.

GUEST OPINION: *Make Christmas merry, healthy*



By Dwayne Hastings
Ethics and Religious Liberty Comm.

youth and seek to recreate them, e.g., make sugar cookies and snicker doodles from scratch as a family. Craft garlands of construction paper loops to decorate your tree. Set aside time to drive through town to see the Christmas lights. Visit a live nativity if one is held in your community.

• A big buildup to Christmas day leads to a big letdown the day after Christmas. Keep the Christmas spirit alive by planning family events during the week after Christmas and throughout January.

• Listen to Christmas carols, even before Thanksgiving!

• Make Jesus the focus. Celebrate the Christ — His birth, His life, His death and resurrection — this season. Rejoice in the new, victorious life you have in Him.

Give a gift of good health to your family this Christmas. Don't let the stress of the season sour your spirit and muddle your family's merriment.

Hastings is a writer for the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, based in Nashville. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press.

ly pathogenic." Swenson is a member of the Christian Medical and Dental Associations.

With the Christmas shopping season upon us, it is wise to plan ahead to minimize the anxiety and maximize the joy that often comes with the season. Experts might call this managing stress.

To avoid the build-up of stress knocking you down during the Christmas holiday, consider these tips:

• Be reasonable in your expectations of the holidays.

• Focus on the first Christmas. Involve your family in a ministry to the less fortunate in your community.

• Be realistic in your spending plans. Set a realistic budget and don't budge from it.

• Avoid impulse shopping. Make sure you save your receipts in order to return merchandise once you've gone home and surveyed all your purchases.

• Take advantage of special sales, but refuse to consider bargains once you've finished your shopping list.

• Plan ahead and take advantage of sales to buy gifts year around, but make sure you keep good track of your "good deals." A toy you bought on clearance for your preschool son doesn't have quite the same value it originally did when you discover it in the attic, still in the bag, when he is in 6th grade.

• Make it a family-centered Christmas. Recall the favorite Christmas memories of your

Candidates take stand on truth of Bible

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (BP and local reports) — A unique CNN/YouTube Republican debate lived up to its ask-anything acclaim Nov. 28 when three of the top candidates were asked if they believed "every word" of the Bible.

The debate among the eight contestants was held in St. Petersburg, Fla., five weeks before Iowa will hold its caucuses on an earlier-than-usual Jan. 3. Florida's primary is scheduled for Jan. 29.

The format featured questions submitted in the form of Internet streaming videos. Staffers at CNN chose which questions from among 5,000 submissions would be aired during the debate. No such debate format or Bible questions have been proffered to Democrat presidential candidates.

The video that contained the Bible question showed a man holding a Bible and asking if the candidates believed "every word" of this Book.

"I believe it, but I don't believe it's necessarily literally true in every single respect," said former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who leads the field in national polls but trails in the early states of Iowa and New Hampshire. "I think there are parts of the Bible that are interpretive. I think there are parts of the Bible that are allegorical. I think there are parts of the Bible that are meant to be interpreted in a modern context."

"So, yes, I believe it. I think it's the greatest book ever written. I read it frequently. I read it very frequently when I've gone through the bigger crises in my life and I find great wisdom in it... But I don't believe every single word in the literal sense of Jonah being in the belly of the whale. There are some things in it that I think were put there as allegorical."

The question then went to former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, whose Mormon beliefs have received much



Guiliani



Romney

attention during the campaign.

"I believe it's the Word of God," he said. "I mean, I might interpret the Word differently than you interpret the Word, but I read the Bible and I believe the Bible is the Word of God. I don't disagree with the Bible. I try and live by it."

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormon church) professes a belief in its own published version of the King James Version of the Bible, although it views three other documents also as scripture: the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price.

Those latter three texts are where the church gets some of its unbiblical beliefs — such as the view that after death Mormon families will stay married forever and be exalted to godhood (see related analysis on page five of this issue).

Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, formerly a Baptist minister, said he believes the Bible is the "Word of revelation to us from God Himself." He also said some parts of the Bible, such as "Go and pluck out your eye," are allegorical.

"The fact is that when people ask do we believe all of it, you either believe it or you don't believe it," he said. "... But the Bible has some messages that nobody really can confuse and [are] really not left up to interpretation. 'Love your neighbor as yourself. And as much as you've done it to the least of these brethren, you've done it unto Me.' Until we get those simple, real easy things right, I'm not sure we ought to spend a whole lot of time fighting over the other parts that are a little bit complicated."

"... [T]here are parts of it I don't fully comprehend and understand," Huckabee added, "because the Bible is a revelation of an infinite God, and no finite person is ever going to fully understand it. If they do, their God is too small."

Among other debate highlights:

- Candidates were asked whether, if abortion becomes illegal, the woman and her doctor should be charged with a crime.

Saying overturning *Roe v. Wade* should be "our No. 1 focus right now," former Tennessee Sen. Fred Thompson said the doctor, not the woman, should be punished.

"I think it should be fashioned along the same lines it is now," he said, saying the type of punishment would be up to

each state. "Most states have abortion laws that prohibit abortion after viability. It goes to the doctor performing the abortion, not the girl, or the young girl, or her parents, whoever it might be. I think that same pattern needs to be followed. It could just be moved up earlier, or much earlier in the process if the state so determined."

U.S. Rep. Ron. Paul also said doctors should be punished and said details of such laws would be up to each state.

- Giuliani and Romney were asked whether, if *Roe* were overturned, they would be willing to sign into law a nationwide ban on abortions.

"I probably would not sign it," Giuliani said. "I would leave it to the states to make that decision."

Said Romney, "I'd be delighted to sign that bill. But ... that's not where America is today. Where America is is [it's] ready to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and return to the states that authority. But if the Congress got there [and] we had that kind of consensus in [this] country, terrific."

- Huckabee was asked "what would Jesus do" regarding the death penalty.

Huckabee said considering death penalty cases as governor was one of the toughest decisions he ever had to make because it was irrevocable. Some crimes, he said, "are so heinous, so horrible" that the death penalty is the only way a civilized nation can "try to deter that person from ever committing that crime again," warning others "that some crimes truly are beyond any other capacity for us to fix."

Being pro-life and supporting the death penalty is not contradictory, Huckabee said.

"[T]here's a real difference between the process of adjudication, where a person is deemed guilty after a thorough judicial process and is put to death by all of us, as citizens, under a law, as opposed to an individual making a decision to terminate a life that has never been deemed guilty because the life never was given a chance to even exist. That's the fundamental difference."

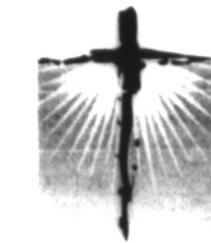
Not satisfied with Huckabee's answer, host Anderson Cooper again asked, "Would Jesus support the death penalty?"

"Jesus was too smart to ever run for public office, Anderson," Huckabee said, drawing laughter. "That's what Jesus would do."

- The candidates were asked why the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy on homosexuals should continue. The question was asked by retired Brig. Gen. Keith Kerr, who came out as a homosexual after leaving the military. After the debate it was learned that Kerr, the man who asked the question, is a co-chair on Democrat Hillary Clinton's National Military Veterans group, Politico.com reported. Kerr said he was appearing at the event on his own.

Baptist invited

WASHINGTON (BP) — When Baptist pastor Roger Freeman visits Washington, D.C., this week, it will be far from a normal trip. Freeman, pastor of First Church in Clarksville, Tenn., will deliver the opening prayer Thursday for one of the more popular yearly traditions in the nation's capital — the lighting ceremony of the National Christmas Tree in front of the White House, held first in 1923. He, his wife Priscilla, and their 17-year-old daughter Sarah will be on stage alongside President Bush and First Lady Laura Bush and other participants. Freeman's prayer, which will last one minute and begin at 5:01 p.m. Eastern time, had to be pre-approved by the National Park Service. Freeman was nominated to deliver the prayer by Amy Spiceland Scofield, who attended his church as a youth and now works for the National Park Service in Washington. Freeman has served as pastor of the church since 1993 and is a former president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention. It is one prayer Freeman says he will rehearse and, unlike others, actually read. President Coolidge started the national Christmas tree tradition in 1923 with the lighting of a 60-foot-tall Community Christmas Tree. The current tree is a 40-foot-tall Colorado blue spruce that was planted in 1978. It was brought to Washington from York, Pa. The ceremony takes place in an area known as the Ellipse, south of the White House.



MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS

THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

PUBLISHED SINCE 1877

DECEMBER 13, 2007

VOL. 131

NO. 49

Looking back

10 years ago

After five years of decline, the Centers for Disease Control announce that the U.S. abortion rate seemed to edge up in 1996.

20 years ago

More than 40 moderate Southern Baptist Convention leaders meet at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport to review events and "look for ways to retrieve our national convention from the hands of the fundamentalists," according to a press release issued after the meeting.

30 years ago

Methodist bishop G. Bromley Oxnam stated in a meeting in St. Louis, Mo., that, "If Southern Baptists continue their current rate of growth, there will be more Southern Baptists than people by the year 2015."



YOU CAN RESPOND RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)

2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)

3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)

4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

A LONG WAY TO NOWHERE?

Years ago when I was recovering from a broken leg, I decided to change my daily exercise habits from running/jogging to riding a stationary bicycle. After checking out the kinds of bikes that were on the market, I decided to invest in a Schwinn Airdyne. It became my early morning home for a number of years. I put the bike by a window where I could look out and see some bushes, trees, birds, and occasionally a squirrel. There was a television nearby if I wanted to catch the early morning news, and there was a rack attached which also allowed me to read as I rode. Then the work began. Every morning, usually in the dark, I would begin pedaling away going nowhere.

On the bike there was an odometer that allowed me to keep up with my miles each day and eventually the total miles I had ridden over the years. I do not know exactly how many years it took me but I remember when I arrived at 25,000 miles. That number was significant to me because I knew that the circumference of the earth was somewhere around 25,000 miles. It occurred to me that I had gone around the world sitting in one spot. Later I looked up the number and found that at the equator the earth measures 24,901.55 miles so I was close. While I had gone the distance around the world, I had gone nowhere. That was somewhat discouraging. I thought of all the places I missed, all of the people I could have seen, and all of the experiences that I could have had if I had just started out walking and circled the earth.

The time invested in taking care of my health by riding the bike had at least kept me from having to spend the time in trying to regain my health. I also began to realize that there were times when I saw beautiful



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

While it was somewhat of a downer, I thought of how many times that is the way many people live. For years they get up, go to the same spot, go through the same routine, cover the same ground, and seemingly go nowhere. Sometimes our churches have worship services week after week, sing the same songs, say some of the same things in prayer, preach similar sermons, and appear to be accomplishing very little, but the more I reflected on where I had been or rather where I had not been I began to realize that it was anything but a waste of time and energy. Even riding a bike in the same place had significant benefits and was worthwhile in ways that may not have been seen. For instance, I realized that the time I was sitting on the bicycle exerting myself physically probably took the place of time that I would have had to sit in the waiting room of a doctor's office to find out that my blood pressure was too high, my sugar levels were out of whack, or simply because I was not feeling good.

The time invested in taking care of my health by riding the bike had at least kept me from having to spend the time in trying to regain my health. I also began to realize that there were times when I saw beautiful

things in God's creation as I just pedaled away and looked out the window. There is something meaningful, even enjoyable and uplifting, about seeing a squirrel digging out in the yard trying to find an acorn or bury one, or scurrying up a tree, or playfully rambling around on a limb with some of his buddies. About 10 minutes of watching that is a whole lot better than an hour of watching Oprah.

Then I thought about the things that I had read during my journey around the world, the thoughts that I had and even the materials that I had memorized during the time I was going nowhere. The longer I thought about those 25,000 miles the more I realized that I had been somewhere and I had accomplished something. During the journey, there was a lot more good accomplished than I had recognized. I think that I could probably make that same case for many people in their jobs. They sometimes feel unimportant and they wonder what contribution they are making in the great scheme of life. They wonder if this journey back and forth, up and down the road, or sitting in the same cubicle every day, contributes or if it is anything worthwhile. I assure you it is. While others may not recognize it and while you yourself may

not recognize it, it is of great value. It is of value to not only the people or the organization where you serve, or the classroom where you teach, or the church where you preach, but it is doing something wonderful for you, which you may not recognize in the daily grind.

Let's just suppose for a moment that today just before noon your boss or someone in your organization comes to you and tells you that you are no longer needed. In the snap of your fingers, your job is terminated. You will not be coming back to work tomorrow, next week, or next month. You have no specific plans for the future and you wonder how you are going to get along. Now you begin to realize how meaningful it is to have something to do, a place to go, people to help, and a job to accomplish. It makes a difference in others, but it blesses you.

I suppose from time to time all of us feel like we are riding a stationary bicycle and just kind of staring out the window at the world. When you feel that way just remember that while you may not think that you are going anywhere you really are. While you may think that you are not accomplishing very much just remember that things are being accomplished in you. So wherever you are going or whatever you are spending time doing today, whether it is work, pleasure, with family or friends, or just alone, keep in mind, "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24).

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STAFF CHANGES

1. Gillsburg Church, Gillsburg, has called Kelly Ott as youth minister.



1. Ott

2. Grace Memorial Church, Gulfport, welcomed their new pastor, Charlie Ray, December 2. Ray is a graduate of Baylor University and New Orleans Seminary. He comes to the church with his wife, Lisa, from New Orleans Seminary where he has served as an adjunct faculty and a teaching and administrative assistant while completing his work on his Ph.D.



2. Ray and wife

3. First Church, Vicksburg, has called Gerry Gore, Pickens, S. Carolina, as minister of music/worship/media. He previously served East Pickens Church. He is a graduate of Hardin-Simmons University and Southwestern Seminary. He and his wife Leslie have two children, Tyler and Hannah.

4. First Church, Batesville, recently called Mark Jones to serve as minister of music. Jones and wife Gale come from First Church, Carthage.

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Analysis: Mormon beliefs outside Bible

First in a three-part series

By Mike Licona
Correspondent

Licona Someday it will happen to you. You are about to sit down for a late breakfast on a Saturday morning. The French toast smells delicious. A glass of orange juice and a cup of coffee will make the start of a great day. You pour the syrup and prepare to take that tasty first bite, when there is a knock on your door. Perhaps it is the neighbor's child asking to play with your son. Maybe it is the guy next door who would like to borrow your tools — again.

You open the door and... oh!... there are two Mormon missionaries standing before you. Sharply dressed and very friendly, they ask if they can come in and tell you about God's good news, but you're unsure.

They claim to be Christians, and you remember your Sunday School teacher talking about Mormonism but most of the points made are vague in your mind and many are forgotten. You desire to talk with them but don't want to get into a conversation unprepared so you politely say, "I'm busy," and close the door.

Ah, yes. Where were you? That's right, back to your breakfast. You slice off a piece of French toast, swish it in syrup, and take a bite. However, while sipping your coffee you feel a sense of disappointment. You know that you just passed up a valuable opportunity to share your faith because you were unprepared. You know that if Jesus had been there He would have spoken with them, and you wonder what it is that Mormons actually believe.

Is Mormonism Christian? Is the Mormon church a cult?

This is the first of three articles that will answer these questions. In part one, we will

take a brief look at the history, the beliefs, and the people of the Mormon church.

History

Mormonism started in 1830 with 24-year-old Joseph Smith Jr. According to Smith, he had several experiences during which God, Jesus, and the angel Moroni gave him instructions.

Part of the instructions supposedly included digging up some gold plates buried by the angel Moroni around A.D. 400 on a hill just outside of Smith's town of Palmyra, N.Y. Smith dug up the plates, claimed they were written in "Reformed Egyptian," and that God had given him the ability to translate them.

This translation became known as the Book of Mormon, a purported account of the ancient inhabitants of North America between 600 B.C. and A.D. 400.

Mormons have four sources of authority: the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and Doctrine and Covenants. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has become one of the fastest growing religions in the world. According to the Mormon church, Latter-day Saints membership now totals nearly 13 million worldwide. The church owns Brigham Young University.

Beliefs

Many beliefs held by the Mormon church are fundamentally different from those found in biblical Christianity. These have been detailed in numerous publications but here are a few of the more prominent ones:

- God was once a human as we are now, and progressed to become God. He is one of many gods.

- Man has the ability to progress and become a god.

- Jesus was the first spirit child of God the Father. Subsequent spirit children are angels and humans. Jesus is the son of God and a member of



Mormon Temple, Salt Lake City

the Godhead, though these are not understood in the sense of biblical Christianity, since in Mormonism they are three individual Gods.

When Mormon missionaries visit you, they usually will not focus on the doctrines previously mentioned. In fact, they probably will not even bring them up. Instead they will seek to find common ground on many of the doctrines biblical Christians believe.

For example, they may begin by saying that God revealed the Old Testament through Moses and the prophets. Then Jesus came, was crucified and resurrected. Evangelicals agree on these facts. Then the differences begin. They will tell you that before Jesus' ascension to heaven, He appeared to the inhabitants of North America and gave them the gospel as well. His message and the history of these inhabitants from roughly 600 B.C. to A.D. 400 are recorded in the Book of Mormon.

Furthermore, they will tell you that since the apostles were not replaced when they were killed, the Christian church went into apostasy. In other words, it abandoned the true faith, and consequently, a restoration was necessary. Mormons believe that God chose Joseph Smith to bring that restoration; therefore, the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the true church.

The People

Mormons are wonderful people who are very sincere about their faith and are generally very caring. Although Mormon scholars, such as those at Brigham Young University, are well aware of the challenges which face Mormonism, Mormon laity, including Mormon missionaries, are pretty much in the dark and would be surprised if you share with them the information that will be contained in the next column in this series.

Licona is director of apologetics & interfaith evangelism at the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in Alpharetta, Ga. His analysis appears courtesy of Baptist Press. Read additional free articles on Mormonism and many other related topics at www.4truth.net.

Bibliocipher

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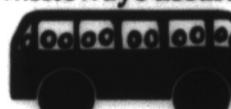
GXS EA PGWS IXOZ
OEAC, WO WP XZO TZH
KZI OZ BXZM OEA
OWCAP ZH OEA
PAGPZXP, MEWDE OEA
TGOEAH EGOE LIO WX
EWP ZMX LZMAH.

GDOP ZXAPANA

Clue: O = T

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: John Twenty: Twenty-Nine.

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email to IBC_personnel@yahoo.com or contact Michael Bull (601) 218-5325.

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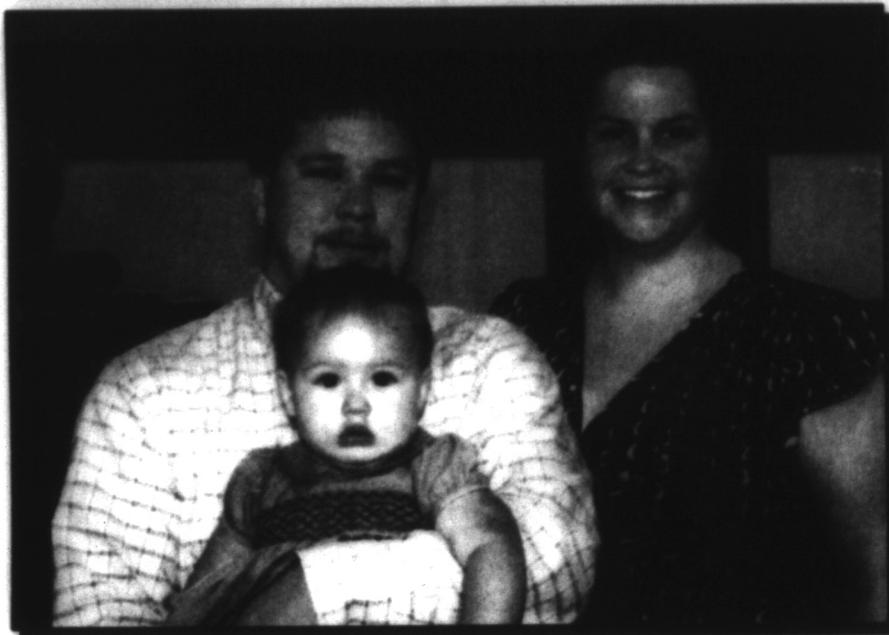
SEEKING FULL-TIME PASTOR. FBC Shannon, Lee County, MS. Send resume to FBC, pastor search committee, P.O. Box 21, Shannon, MS 38868.

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5

JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. Parent-Child Dedication, Big Level Church, Wiggins



2. Operation Christmas Child, First Church, Fannin



3. Operation Christmas Child, Crossview Church, Brandon



4. Deacon Ordination, Central Church, Lincoln Association



MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS

1. **Big Level Church, Wiggins**, held its parent-child dedication on September 16. Shown are B. J. and Miranda Lewis with Riley.

2. **First Church, Fannin**, prepared over 260 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child. Shown are Bill Barnes, Leon Bass, and Steve Abercrombie.

3. **Crossview Church, Brandon**, ranked first in Rankin County and 51st in all Southern Baptist Churches in per capita giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering in 2006. The church also packed 216 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child, surpassing their goal of 200. Shown are the participants.

4. **Central Church, Lincoln Association**, ordained David Smith and James Chambers as deacons Nov. 11. Shown are Smith, pastor Ryan Thurman, and Chambers.

5. Youth from **Bethel Church, Smith Association**, carry a thank you gift to Homewood Volunteer Fire Department. Shown are Matti Parkman, Kellie Black, Margie Black, Carlie Vinzant, Amy McDaniel, and Jacob McGriff.

6. Children and youth at **Sebastopol Church, Sebastopol**, wrapped coins collected for World Hunger. The total amount raised was \$1457.56.

7. **First Church, Columbus**, dedicated shoeboxes to the Operation Christmas Child Ministry of Samaritans Purse. The church gave 1199 shoeboxes. Shown are some of the participants.

8. The children of **Calvary Church, Ellisville**, recently held a production called American Ideal, which was similar to the popular American Idol TV show. Shown are some of the participants.



5. Youth project, Bethel Church, Smith Association



6. Coins collected, Sebastopol Church, Sebastopol

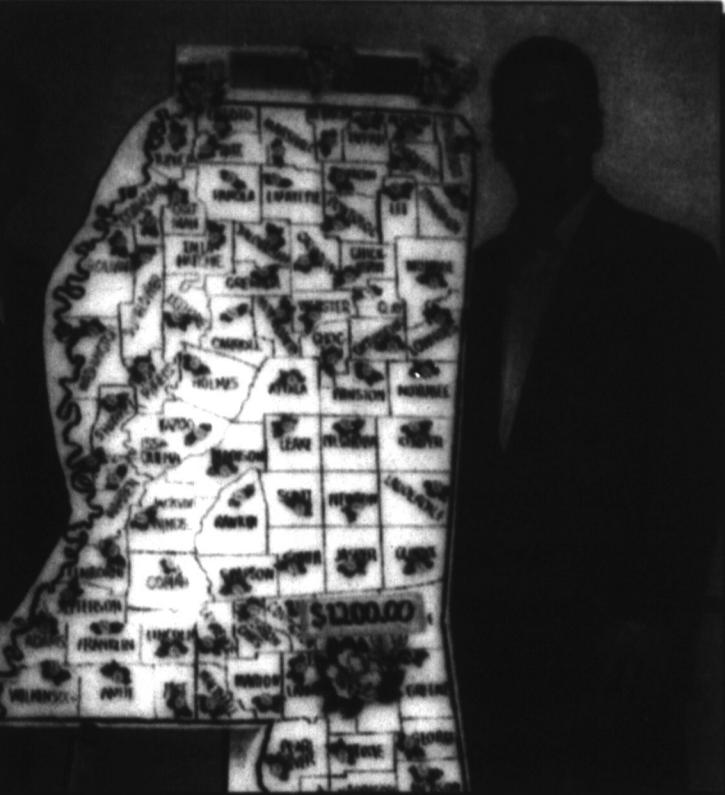


7. Shoebox Collection, First Church, Columbus



8. American Ideal, Calvary Church, Ellisville

JUST FOR THE RECORD



9. Margaret Lackey goal reached, Park Haven Church, Laurel



10. Moore recognized, Rocky Point Church, Carthage



11. 100th Anniversary, Derby Church, Poplarville



12. Operation Christmas Child, Center Terrace Church, Canton

9. The members of Park Haven Church, Laurel, reach their goal of \$1200 for the Margaret Lackey State Missions Offering. Shown are wMu director Jo Tullus and pastor Steven Holifield.

10. Lita Moore resigned as music director of Rocky Point Church, Carthage, after 18 years. She received a plaque and other gifts from the church family.

11. Derby Church, Derby Community, Poplarville, recently celebrated its 100th anniversary. Carl Myers, AMD, presented a certificate commemorating the event. Shown are Brian Anthony, Kelly Mitchell, Myers, Lee Smith, and interim pastor Stan Davis.

12. Center Terrace Church, Canton, exceeded a goal of 125 Operation Christmas Child boxes with a total of 139. Danny Berry, pastor.

13. Topeka Church, Jayess, ordained Donnie Stuart as deacon November 18. Shown are Jesse Stuart, Emily Stuart, Samuel Stuart, Regina Stuart, Stuart, Jacob Stuart, and pastor Dale Authement.

14. The youth of Summerland Church, Taylorsville and Woodhaven Church, Ocean Springs, combined for The 24-Hour Retreat, Part II. Shown are the participants.

15. Mt. Horeb Church, Meridian, recently ordained and Daryl Mathews and Mike Minchew as deacons. Shown are Mathews, Sabrina Mathews, Kaitlyn Mathews, Minchew, and Ginger Minchew.

16. Children from Lynn Ray Road Church, Petal, filled 160 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child. Shown are some of the participants.

17. Gumpond Church, will be hosting The Riders Gospel Group, 11 a.m., December 16. A Christmas potluck fellowship will follow.

18. Cleary Church, Florence, presents The Glory of Christmas, December 15 and 16, at 6:30 p.m..

19. Christmas on the Creek will be presented at Concord Church, Booneville, December 14, 15, 21, and 22, 7 p.m. until 9 p.m.

20. McAdams Church, Attala Association, will have its Christmas programs Dec. 16, with the children's program at 11 a.m. and the adult cantata at 6 p.m.



13. Deacon ordination, Topeka Church, Jayess



14. Youth, Summerland Church, Taylorsville, and Woodhaven Church, Ocean Springs



15. Deacon ordinations, Mt. Horeb Church, Meridian



16. Operation Christmas Child, Lynn Ray Road Church, Petal

JUST FOR THE RECORD



21. Minter honored, Trinity Church, Petal

21. **Trinity Church, Petal**, honored William L. Minter Sept. 8 with a plaque for being a charter member of the church for over 50 years. Shown are Paul Spell, Minter, and interim pastor Kent Cooper.

22. **South 28th Ave. Church, Hattiesburg**, recently ordained Tom Williams,

Zachary Burks, and Gregory Kriedik as deacons. Shown are Williams, Burks, pastor Greg Burks, Kriedik, and Jack Roderick.

23. **Pleasant Ridge Church, Dumas**, ordained Adam Rushing as deacon. Shown are Kara Rushing, Rushing, and pastor Don Wilson.



22. Deacon ordinations, South 28th Ave. Church, Hattiesburg

24. **Trinity Church, Rankin County**, ordained John Holmes as Deacon on August 26. Shown are Holmes and Pastor Kenny Goff.

25. **Concord Church, Benton-Tippah Association**, welcomed Brian Jones, Baptist Student Union



25. Jones

Summer missionary from Blue Mountain College, November 4, who shared his experiences as a missionary to Nepal.

26. **Lilly Orchard Church, Moss Point**, will host their first annual New Year's Eve Bible Conference Dec. 31, 6 p.m.-midnight. Speakers include Charles Gibbs, Don Boone, Anis Shorosh, David Williams, Steve Cirlot, Rodney Coleman, Rodney Williams, Robbie Howard, James Messer, and Jerry Reed. For more information, call (228) 217-4342.

27. **Franklin Creek Church, Moss Point**, is presenting their children's Christmas musical, Angel's Alert, Dec. 16, 6:30 p.m.

28. **Lakeside Church, Hattiesburg**, sponsored a turkey shoot November 10 to raise money for their building fund. Over \$1200 was raised. The WMU prepared and delivered Thanksgiving food boxes to the needy, and the members of the church donated 24 shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse.



23. Deacon ordination, Pleasant Ridge Church, Dumas



24. Deacon ordination, Trinity Church, Rankin County

COLLEGE NEWS

1. Abby Boykin, Taylorsville, was crowned the 2008 Miss William Carey University at the pageant held recently on the Hattiesburg campus. Shown are Kerrie Reddoch, Taylorsville, first runner up, Boykin, Jessica Cofield, Wiggins, second runner up, and Jessica Boyd, Gulfport, third runner up.



2. Dove

2. Amanda Dove, Lumberton, received the Spirit of Miss Carey award at the recent 2008 Miss William Carey University pageant.

3. William Carey University will celebrate Christmas Vespers Dec. 13, 7 p.m., and Keyboards at Christmas Dec. 18, 7 p.m., Smith Auditorium of Thomas Fine Arts. The public is invited. For more information, call the Winters School of Music at (601) 318-6175.

4. **Mississippi College** J. Taylor Clemmer, a graduate of Madison Central High, received the Hamp King award, a \$2000 scholarship from the Mississippi Society of CPAs. Carrie Jones, a graduate of the Lamar School Meridian, received the Gary E. Thornton Memorial Scholarship from the same organization.

5. The new J.L. Holloway Business & Technology Center at Mississippi College is named in honor of Holloway, a generous supporter of the university, who is chairman and president of Tenax, LLC.

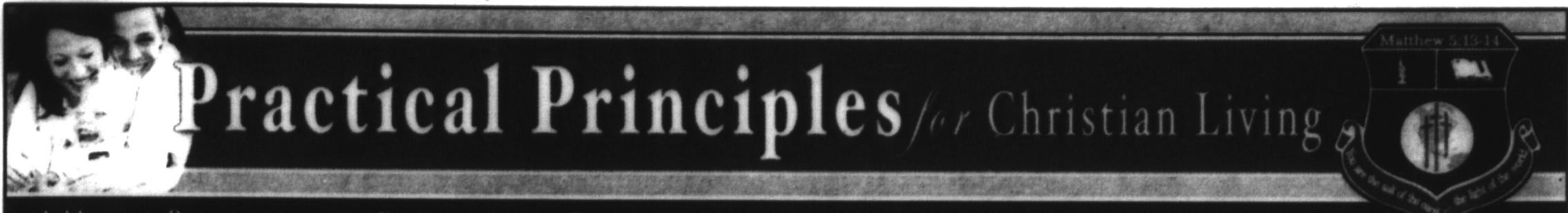
6. **Mississippi College** is hosting Career Day, Feb. 12, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., with recruiters from hospitals, school districts, accounting firms, and other companies on campus. For additional details, employers are encouraged to go to <http://www.mc.edu/career/careerdayreg.php>.



1. Miss WCU Pageant

7. Beginning in May 2008, Mississippi College will offer nine courses in nursing, eliminating the

need for nurses to leave their jobs on evenings and weekends to take classes on campus.



A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE CHRISTIAN ACTION COMMISSION OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION • VOLUME 7 • ISSUE 12

WRAPPING UP 2007

By Jimmy Porter, executive-director
Miss. Baptist Christian Action Commission

The sun will soon set on the final day of 2007. As in every year, there are moments to be cherished and some to be forgotten. In the final analysis, it has been a good year, one in which to be extremely thankful unto God, our creator and sustainer of life. Today I call your attention to four items.

First, the Christian Action Commission (CAC) thanks you for your support and help this past year. You have been very supportive of the Memorial to the Missing. Right now we have approximately 47 million pennies and yes, we are still collecting them. If you haven't contributed yet, you are not too late. This Christmas you can make a contribution by sending your check to the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, PO Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205, and marking it for the Memorial to the Missing. All gifts are tax deductible.

The second item that needs our attention is the new movie that has been released, "The Golden Compass." This movie is the first of a trilogy taken from Phillip Pullman's "His Dark Materials." Pullman has a distinct distaste for Christianity since he is either atheist or agnostic. The most anti-religious biases are not in the first book but in the latter two. The CAC encourages every parent to go online to www.bpnews.net/printfriendly.asp?ID=26849 and read the article written by Michael Foust. Be warned that this is not a harmless movie but a movie with an agenda.

The third item is to inform you that Dr. Lee Yancey, Senior Consultant for the CAC, ran for and was elected senator for District 20 of Madison and Rankin Counties. He has served Mississippi Baptists faithfully for the past seven years, and he will be missed when his tenure ends on December 31st. He is to be congratulated on this very special achievement, and no doubt you join me in wishing him well as he embarks on this new journey. This leads me to the final item before we say goodbye to 2007.

One of the greatest needs for our state and our legislators is for Christian people like you to pray daily for the legislative process during the 2008 session. Recently I met a young lady, Mrs. Rita Parkes, who is developing a ministry that enables this process.

She is a member of a Southern Baptist church in Corinth, Mississippi and travels all over our state seeking prayer warriors for this effort. This ministry is called The Mississippi Governmental Prayer Alliance (MSGPA). It is a ministry of the Mississippi Prayer Network whose mission is to educate and activate the body of Christ to pray for our government officials.

The 2008 goals of the MSGPA are to have prayer teams at the Capitol everyday during the four month legislative session and to mobilize enough prayer partners so that every senator and every representative is covered with daily prayers.

To be a part of this ministry, write MSGPA, PO Box 344, Corinth, MS 38835. You can call 662-287-6323 or get information from www.mspga.org. There is a small fee for the packet of materials that will be sent to you to assist in praying for, calling, and writing the state legislators you select for this ministry.

I do hope some of you will consider this ministry because there are several new men and women beginning their first terms next year, and they will welcome your prayer efforts on their behalf. In fact, Paul gave this exact charge to Timothy when he said, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all goodness and honesty." 1 Timothy 2:1, 2.

Rita Wood, Lee Yancey, and I wish for all our Mississippi Baptist family a wonderful Christmas and a blessed New Year.

JUST FOR THE RECORD



29. Baby Dedication, Center Ridge Church, Yazoo City

29. Center Ridge Church, Yazoo City, held a baby dedication Nov. 18. Shown are the participants.

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Review: Anti-Christian film is 'challenge,' no more

By R. Albert Mohler Jr.
Correspondent



Mohler
The release of *The Golden Compass* as a major motion picture represents a new challenge for Christians — especially parents. The release of a popular film with major actors that presents a message directly subversive of Christianity is something new. *The Golden Compass* is not likely to be the last.

Having seen the movie at an advance viewing and having read all three books of *His Dark Materials*, I can assure Christians that we face a real challenge — one that will require careful thinking and intellectual engagement.

The challenge

First of all, *The Golden Compass* (rated PG-13) is an extremely attractive movie. Like the book on which it is based, the movie is a very sophisticated story that is very well told. The casting was excellent. Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig (the latest James Bond actor) are joined by others including Sam Elliott and newcomer Dakota Blue Richards, who plays the central role of 11-year-old Lyra Belacqua.

Kidman is chilling as the beautiful but evil Marisa Coulter and Craig is perfect as Lord Asriel. Actor Ian McKellen (Gandalf in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy) is the voice of Iorek Byrnison, the armored bear.

The movie is very well done and will be very attractive to audiences of all ages. The special effects are superior to any previous movie of the type, including the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (also released by New Line Cinema). Everything is in place for this to be a blockbuster at the box office.

Second, the movie is based in a story that is captivating, sophisticated, and truly interesting. Philip Pullman is a skilled writer and teller of tales. His invented worlds of *The Golden Compass* and the entire *His Dark Materials* trilogy are about as good as the fantasy genre can offer.

His characters are believable and the dialogue is constant — largely due to Pullman's brilliant invention of a companion for each character, a "daemon" (a person's soul in the form of a talking animal).

The bottom line is that these books and this movie will attract a lot of attention and will captivate many readers and viewers.

What's the problem?

This is not just any fantasy trilogy or film project. Philip Pullman has an agenda — an agenda about as subtle as an army tank. His agenda is nothing less than to expose what he believes is the tyranny of the Christian faith and the Christian church. His hatred of the biblical storyline is clear. He is an atheist whose most important literary project is intended to offer a moral narrative that will reverse the biblical account of the fall and provide a liberating mythology for a new secular age.

The great enemy of humanity in the three books, *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass* (together known as *His Dark*

Materials

Materials) is the Christian church, identified as the evil Magisterium. The Magisterium, representing church authority, is afraid of human freedom and seeks to repress human sexuality.

The Magisterium uses the biblical narrative of the Fall and the doctrine of original sin to repress humanity. It is both violent and vile and it will stop at nothing to protect its own interests and to preserve its power.

Pullman's attack on biblical Christianity is direct and undeniable. He once questioned why his books attracted little controversy even as the Harry Potter books attracted so much. He told an Australian newspaper that what he is "saying things that are far more subversive than anything poor old Harry has said. My books are about killing God."

What will viewers see?

The direct attack on Christianity and God is toned down in the movie, but any informed person will recognize the Magisterium as representing the church and Christianity. Of course, in our world the Magisterium is the authoritative leadership of the Roman Catholic Church. In Pullman's world it represents Christianity as a whole.

Indeed, Pullman's tale tells of John Calvin assuming the papacy and moving the headquarters to Geneva, thus combining the Catholic and Reformation traditions into one. In the movie, the Magisterium appears to be located in London. In any event, the point is not subtle.

The most direct attacks upon Christianity and God do not appear until the last book, *The Amber Spyglass*, in which Lyra and Will (a boy her age who first appears in the second book) eventually kill God, who turns out to be a decrepit and feeble old imposter who was hardly worth the killing.

Is Pullman's attack on Christianity exaggerated by his critics? No. His attack is neither hidden nor subtle. The entire premise of the trilogy is that Lyra is the child foretold by prophecy who will reverse the curse of the Fall and free humanity from the lie of original sin. Whereas in Christian theology it is Jesus Christ who reverses the curse through His work of atonement on the Cross, Pullman presents his own theology of sorts in which the Fall is reversed through the defiance of these children.

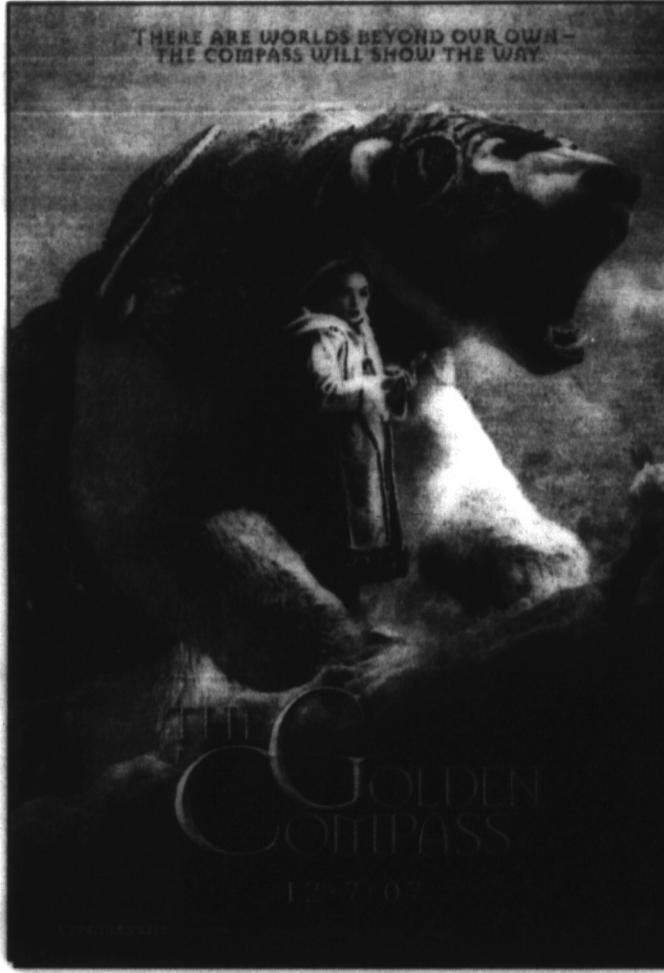
As Pullman insists, Eve and Adam were right to eat the forbidden fruit and God was a tyrant to forbid them the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The supernatural element of Pullman's story is "Dust," which is seen by the Magisterium as original sin but is presented by Pullman as the essence of life itself. In *The Golden Compass*, Lyra is given an "alethiometer" or golden compass which is filled with Dust and tells the truth to one qualified to operate it.

Readers are told that a great battle is coming in which forces fighting for human freedom and happiness will confront (and destroy) the Magisterium and God.

In the last volume of the trilogy, a character known as Dr. Mary Malone

THERE ARE WORLDS BEYOND OUR OWN — THE COMPASS WILL SHOW THE WAY.



explains her discovery to Lyra and Will: "I used to be a nun, you see. I thought physics could be done to the glory of God, till I saw there wasn't any God at all and that physics was more interesting anyway. The Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake, that's all."

Is there more?

Yes, and it has to do with sex — surprisingly graphic and explicit sex. Pullman believes that the Christian church is horribly repressive about sex and that this is rooted in the idea of the Fall. As he told Hanna Rosin of the Atlantic Monthly, "Why the Christian Church has spent 2,000 years condemning this glorious moment, well, that's a mystery. I want to confront that, I suppose, by telling a story that the so-called original sin is anything but. It's the thing that makes us fully human."

Puberty is a big part of Pullman's concern. Coming-of-age stories are one of the most common forms of fiction, but Pullman's pack a punch that readers cannot miss. He wants to celebrate the adolescent's arrival at sexual awareness. The child's daemon can change forms until puberty. At that point it is fixed as a single creature that reflects the personality and character of the young adult.

Puberty means the coming of sexual feelings. The Magisterium would prefer that children grow up without experiencing sexual temptation, so it is conducting an experiment in order to separate children from their daemons before puberty, when their daemon can no longer change. This procedure, known as "intercision" makes the child a "severed child" who has no daemon — and thus no soul. The Magisterium has assigned Mrs. Coulter the job of abducting the children and taking them to the North for this experiment.

As Mrs. Coulter explains to Lyra (who is revealed to be her own daughter) in the first book: "All that happens is a little cut, and then everything's peaceful. Forever! You

see, your daemon's a wonderful friend and companion when you are young, but at the age we call puberty, the age you're coming to very soon, darling, daemons bring all sorts of troublesome thoughts and feelings, and that's what lets Dust in. A quick little operation before that, and you're never troubled again."

In *The Golden Compass*, Lyra and her companions free the children held at this experimental station in the North and destroy it. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra and Will reverse the story of the Edenic Fall by consummating a sexual act in the garden.

Again, Pullman is not subtle. Keep in mind that this is a series of books marketed to children and adolescents. Lyra puts a red fruit to Will's lips and Will "knew at once what she meant, and that he was too joyful to speak."

Within moments, the 13-year olds are involved in some kind of unspecified sexual act.

"The word love set his nerves ablaze," Pullman writes of Will. "All his body thrilled with it, and he answered her in the same words, kissing her hot face over and over again, drinking in with adoration the scent of her body and her warm, honey-fragrant hair and her sweet, moist mouth that tasted of the little red fruit."

Just a few pages later, Will and Lyra will dare to touch each other's daemons. That passage is even more sexually charged and explicit than the first. The adolescents now know "that neither daemon would change now, having felt a lover's hands on them. These were their shapes for life: they would want no other."

Pullman vs. Lewis

Put simply, Pullman hates C.S. Lewis's work, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. He told Hannah Rosin that Lewis's famous work is "morally loathsome" and "one of the most ugly and poisonous things I ever read." Narnia, he said, "is the Christian one... And mine is the non-Christian."

When the first Narnia film was released in 2005, Pullman described the books as "a peevish blend of racist, misogynistic and reactionary prejudice."

Indeed, Pullman's *His Dark Materials* is intended as an answer to Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. What Lewis (and J. R. R. Tolkien) did for Christianity, Pullman wants to do for atheism.

What should we do?

A good first step would be to take a deep breath. The Christian faith is not about to be toppled by a film, nor by a series of fantasy books. Pullman has an agenda that is clear, and Christians need to inform themselves of what this agenda is and what it means.

At the same time, nothing would serve his agenda better than to have Christians speaking recklessly or unintelligently about the film or the books.

Mohler is president of Southern in Louisville, Ky. This column is adapted from his weblog, www.AlbertMohler.com, and appears courtesy of Baptist Press.

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Being Changed by the Savior

Luke 1:26-31,34-35,38,46-50

By Andy Vaughn

A major component of life that is common to all people is change. People often experience change by graduating from school, finding a job, taking a leadership role in church, marriage, children, divorce, losing a job, and retirement. Change occurs in a person's life in multiple ways and at different times. It is important to understand that change in a person's life not only influences their external surroundings, but impacts who they are as a person.

Some people seek change in life as indicated by the statement, "I need a change of pace." On the other hand, some people treat change as unwarranted by stating, "We will change nothing, we're going to do it just like

we always have." Whether or not change is wanted, it has a tremendous impact on a person's entire life.

During the holiday season people tend to be more mindful of the changes that have occurred in their life. The presence or absence of family and friends stirs the emotions of a person reminding them of events in the past and upcoming changes that will occur. Some people experience great joy in change, others may experience depression and loneliness.

No matter what emotional heading describes the changes in a person's life, people must realize that God can change their life through the Savior. Consider the question, "How has Jesus' birth made an impact on my life?"

Vaughn

Take it a step further and ask, "How can I share the changes Christ has made in my life with someone else?" Keep these questions in mind as we look at God's word together.

Luke 1:31 (NASB) says, "And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus." Mary's life changed in a tremendous way upon hearing the announcement from the angel Gabriel. She had her life on track to be married to Joseph, and she was not expecting a change such as this to occur. From her womb, the Savior was bringing about change in her life.

Luke 1:34 of God's word states, "And Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'" Mary was overwhelmed at the change God was bringing to her life. Her thought was, "A virgin can't have a baby!" God chose a young woman who was an engaged virgin to be His instru-

ment for bringing the Savior into the world. God changed her for His purpose!

Notice that change does not always come at the most convenient time. Mary was busy with her life and her plans. Everyone is busy with too much to handle already, especially too busy to have to handle a life changing event. In the midst of change, it is important to look for God's answer rather than our own understanding. He will reveal to us what He is doing.

Verses 35-36 make it clear that God was bringing about this change in Mary's life by stating, "The power of the Most High will overshadow you." The focus of the change in Mary's life was not on Mary, but on God and His work. We must trust God and His power in the changes we face in life, rather than get bogged down in the impossibility of what is taking place. God made it possible according to verse 37.

Verse 38 describes Mary's submission to God as His committed servant. During this life

changing event she had a choice to make. She could either accept the change God made in her life through the Savior, or she could reject God's work and go about her own way. Mary honored God in her choice to be changed by the Savior. We are encouraged to submit ourselves to God and His saving purpose for life in the Savior.

As Mary experienced change in her life through the Savior, she rejoiced in the work that God was doing. Luke 1:49 says, "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name." Not only was her life changed by the Savior, she shared this change with those around her.

As God changes our life through the Savior, we are encouraged to tell others of the life change that He has made in us. How has your life been changed by the Savior? Are you honoring God by sharing with others the life changing power of the Savior?

Vaughn is pastor of First Church, Fulton.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Aspire to Walk with God

Genesis 6:9-18, 22

By Meleen Moore

As I complete this article, my mind races back exactly one year. I had spent the week in Houston, TX with my brother as he battled cancer. On Friday, the word came that time was short...only a few days. I had relived in thought (as he could not talk) our childhood on a dairy farm in South Mississippi and growing up in a Christian home. I knew his earthly walk with the Lord was almost over. My brother was a Baptist minister having left the farm at the age of 35 with his lovely family, a wife and four children, to attend seminary and answer God's call as a pastor. As we gathered around him with memories and hymns of praise, he finished his walk with God to the tune of "Victory in Jesus". Walk with God, he did,

and that was the center of his ministry for people to be passionate about glorifying and serving God.

Follow God's Leadership
Genesis 6:9-10

Noah, a known 9th generation from Adam, had a passion to walk with God. Genesis 6: 9 KJV says "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord". Grace, that unmerited favor that only God can give, sustained Noah in a world of corruption. God described Noah, as "perfect in his generation" (Genesis 6:9 KJV) suggesting that he was set apart by God. He was not sinless but wholehearted in his belief of God. Through trust and faith, Noah was constantly aware of the presence of God and his fellowship with Him.



Moore Beware of
Judgment Genesis

6:11-13

Noah was a rich example of a father as the scripture records his three sons as Shem, Ham and Japheth. He was faithful, communed with God and careful to do the will of God.

confided in Noah that the end of all flesh had come before Him. God was an eye witness to the corruption and deemed the situation hopeless. Matthew Henry stated the "the ruins of the wicked were decreed and determined". God had made up His mind — beware of judgment.

Obey God's Instruction
Gen 6:14-18, 22

God asked Noah to build an ark in preparation for the greatest catastrophe of His creation—the end of the old world and the beginning of a new era. More scripture space is given to the flood than the creation — two chapters, and to the fall of man — one chapter. The announced judgment by the flood was given four chapters. God gave Noah specific instructions of every detail of the ark from design, wood, and usage of pitch, length, breadth and height to the window and one door. Noah was God's instrument to save mankind as he accepted the enormous chal-

lenge to build the ark. Noah took a stand for God in the face of the wicked world around him. For the 120 years of building the ark, Noah preached judgment and mercy—calling for repentance. Repentance meaning the change of man's will to be the will of God but according to 1 Peter 3:20 there were no converts in that span of time. The flood showed God's wrath against human sin and a plan for salvation of His creation in preserving a remnant of mankind and animal. Through the covenant with Noah, man can be reassured of God care. The ark was not for navigation but for preservation of freight — a safe haven. "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" Genesis 6:22 KJV. As God closed the door of the ark, He sealed judgment of the ungodly that refused Noah's warning by word and deed. "And Noah walked with God" Genesis 6: 9 KJV. How passionate are we to walk with God?

Moore is a member of Macedonia Church, Petal.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) type-written, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

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THE BAPTIST
Record

Panel wants pressure on Burmese military rulers

WASHINGTON (BP) — Effective, international pressure on the military junta of Burma, also known as Myanmar, to change its repressive ways depends on the leadership of the United States, a bipartisan, religious liberty panel was told in a Capitol Hill hearing.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) heard witnesses testify Dec. 3 about Burma's bloody September crackdown on peaceful protests led by Buddhist monks and what the United States and other international actors could do to help bring change in the Southeast Asian country.

There was an agreement that the United States had responded firmly but needed to do more, especially in coordinating an international effort. Witnesses also said the United Nations and countries such as China and India could do much more.

"I think we're not going to see the international community come together in an effective way unless the U.S. takes the lead," said Michael Green, a senior adviser at the Center for International Studies who formerly worked at the National Security Council (NSC). "We don't necessarily want to be the face of this international approach, but we have to be the engine."

The confrontation between Burmese citizens and the regime began in mid-August when people began protesting an exorbitant rise in fuel prices instigated by the military junta. It intensified when thousands of Buddhist monks joined the demonstrations. The military put down the protests in late

September by killing some protesters, beating and jailing others, and raiding Buddhist monasteries.

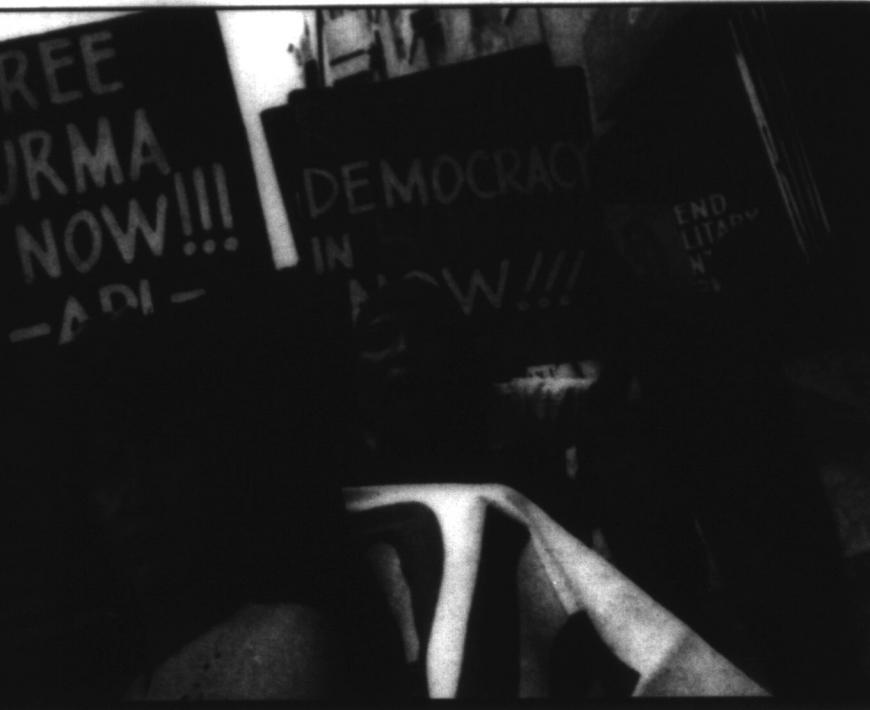
The junta reported 14 deaths among dissenters, one witness said at the hearing, but others estimate the figure is much higher. About 5,000 people, including 2,000 monks, were arrested, the panel was told.

The Burmese regime's violent put-down of the protests has been met by "broad international indignation," but it will be an "uphill battle" to produce reform, Green told the USCIRF members at the hearing. He described the U.S. government's proposals as "very strong and very smart." He also said China, India, the United Nations and the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) had taken some important, though inadequate, steps. Burma is one of the 10 members of ASEAN.

The United States, "in spite of some very good sanctions... really has not brought together this effort in a coordinated way to make sure that the sanctions are enforced," Green told the commissioners. "We really can't afford to wait, because the international indignation and focus is going to dissipate. It's not too late, but it's getting there."

The U.S. needs a senior level official in place, such as at the NSC or State Department, to



PROTESTING BURMA — The bloody crackdown by the military junta of Burma, also known as Myanmar, against protests by civilians and Buddhist monks in September prompted protests in the Philippines and elsewhere around the world. Witnesses at a hearing by U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Dec. 3 urged the United States to lead international efforts to press for reform in the Asian country. Photo by Luis Liwanag/AFP/Getty Images.

coordinate the effort, he said.

Jared Genser, a human rights lawyer, told the panel, "Likely what is required is both more sanctions and more engagement. The sanction-based approach has been confined primarily to Western democracies."

The United States ordered sanctions on new investments in Burma in 1997 and on the import of numerous goods in 2003, he said.

"Rather than concluding economic sanctions have failed, as some have argued internationally, it is actually more accurate to say they haven't really been tried in any mean-

ingful way, except by the United States," said Genser, president of Freedom Now, which works to free prisoners of conscience overseas.

Both Genser and Aung Din, executive director of the U.S. Campaign for Burma, called for Congress to pass the Burma JADE Act, H.R. 3890, which would expand U.S. sanctions to Burmese gems that go through third-party countries on their path to this country.

Din also recommended the selection of a U.S. sanctions coordinator for Burma.

The U.N. Security Council probably must adopt a mean-

ingful resolution to bring about change in Burma, Genser said.

Southern Baptist church-state specialist Richard Land, who chaired the hearing for USCIRF, reiterated the commission's call for a Security Council action "that calls for the release of Burmese prisoners, an end to the regime's crackdown and real dialogue that leads to peaceful transition to democracy," as well as the panel's request that the U.S. leverage other governments to pressure Burma.

"The international community needs to demand a full accounting of the latest atrocities in Burma so that we can know the full scope of the Burmese military's brutality and can hold those responsible accountable," said Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "All monks need to be freed immediately and unconditionally."

Land is a vice chair of USCIRF, serving in his sixth year on the panel.

The State Department has included Burma on its list of "countries of particular concern" (CPC) ever since it began issuing an annual report on international religious freedom in 1999. In May, USCIRF urged the State Department to retain Burma as a CPC, a category reserved for governments that have "engaged in or tolerated systemic and egregious violations of religious freedom." The State Department has yet to release its CPC list this year.

The regime promotes Buddhism but also works to control it, jailing monks who have opposed the junta's policies, according to USCIRF.

LifeWay study shows steep rise in Calvinist SBC pastors

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP) — Nearly 30% of recent Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) seminary graduates now serving as church pastors identify themselves as Calvinists, according to data presented during the opening session of a conference on Reformed theology and the SBC.

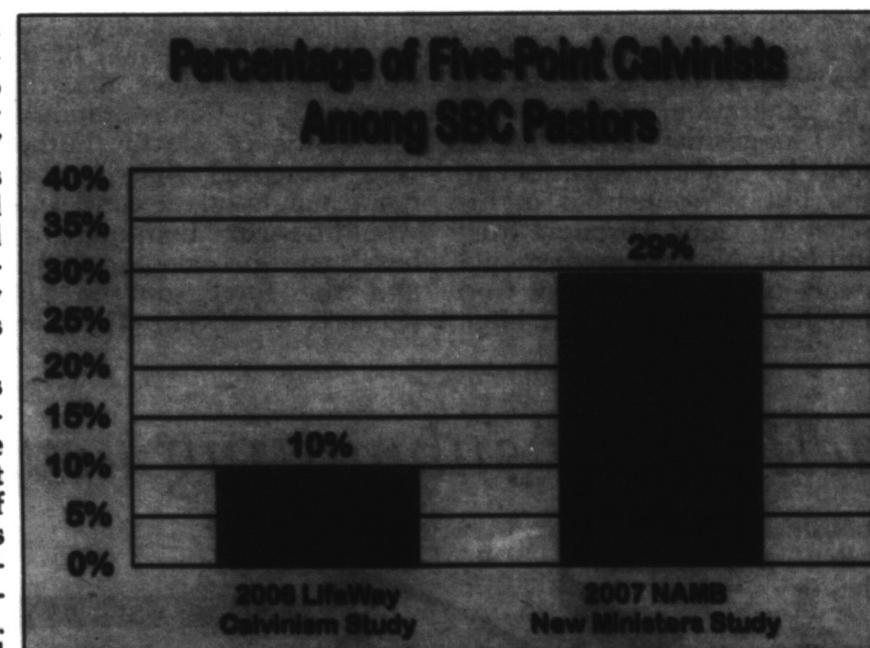
By contrast, in the SBC at large the number of pastors who affirm the five points of Calvinism is around 10%, Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research, said in reporting various findings by LifeWay Research and the North American Mission Board (NAMB) Center for Missional Research.

Such data, Stetzer noted, perhaps gives an indication why a conference such as Building Bridges: Southern Baptists and Calvinism is taking place. The three-day gathering, with approximately 550 attendees, is being co-sponsored by Founders Ministries and Southeastern Seminary at LifeWay Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina.

Founders Ministries formed in 1982 to advance Reformed theology in SBC churches.

Stetzer's presentation relayed additional information from a 2006 LifeWay Research study combined with 2007 research from NAMB's Center for Missional Research, which surveyed SBC pastors who graduated from SBC seminary master's degree programs between 1998-2004.

Stetzer, who also is LifeWay's missiologist-in-residence, noted that the research showed that among pastors of Southern Baptist churches who are recent SBC seminary graduates, 29% indicated they are Calvinists. Stetzer said 27% of 1,234 recent seminary graduate respondents serving in SBC church leadership positions "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree" that they are five-point Calvinists, while 67% affirmed that God's "grace is irresistible" and 58% said they believe "people do not



choose to become Christians, God chooses and calls people who respond to him."

The numbers of graduates who affirmed Calvinism rose steadily between students who graduated in

1998 and those who completed their degrees in 2004, Stetzer said. In the last year of the study, 34% of those serving in SBC churches identified themselves as five-point Calvinists.

"It would be difficult to say that Calvinism is not a growing influence in SBC life; [it] certainly [is] a growing influence in the graduates of our seminaries," Stetzer said.

NAMB's research complements the Calvinism study that LifeWay Research conducted in 2006, Stetzer noted. The LifeWay study surveyed a cross-section of 413 randomly selected SBC pastors. That study placed the number of pastors who affirm the five points of Calvinism in the SBC at around 10%.

NAMB's survey, however, sought to examine recent seminary graduates only, many of whom likely would be younger than the pastors that the LifeWay study canvassed, Stetzer pointed out.